

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 032673

FOLLOWING TEL SENT ACTION CAIRO INFO LONDON FROM SECSTATE
FEBRUARY 19:

QUOTE STATE 032673

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: BEXP, PFOR, EG, UK

SUBJECT: MINE CLEARANCE OF SUEZ CANAL

REF: STATE 30395

1. DEPARTMENT AND DOD HAVE FORMULATED FOLLOWING GUIDANCE
FOR ANSWERING QUESTIONS THAT MIGHT ARISE IN CONNECTION
WITH US MILITARY TECHNICAL TEAM DESPATCHED TO EGYPT ON SUEZ
CANAL MINE CLEARANCE:

2. QUESTION: CAN YOU COMMENT ON REPORTS THAT A US MILI-
TARY TEAM HAS BEEN SENT TO EGYPT TO HELP CLEAR MINES FROM
THE SUEZ CANAL?

3. ANSWER: AS YOU KNOW, THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT IS PRO-
CEEDING WITH PLANS FOR REOPENING THE SUEZ CANAL, A STEP
WHICH NOW BECOMES POSSIBLE WITH THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE
EGYPT-ISRAELI MILITARY DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT. THE
EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT RECENTLY APPROACHED US, ALONG WITH
SEVERAL OTHER COUNTRIES, FOR ASSISTANCE IN CLEARING MINES
AND OTHER EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE IN AND AROUND THE SUEZ
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CANAL. SINCE WE LACK INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT IS INVOLVED,

WE HAVE OFFERED TO SEND A SMALL TEAM OF MILITARY EXPERTS TO DISCUSS THE MATTER WITH THE EGYPTIANS AND TO REPORT THEIR FINDINGS TO WASHINGTON. THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT ACCEPTED THIS OFFER. WE WILL BE IN A BETTER POSITION TO KNOW HOW RESPONSIVE WE CAN BE TO EGYPT'S REQUEST FOR

ASSISTANCE AFTER THE TEAM RETURNS WITH ITS FINDINGS.

4. QUESTION: DOESN'T THE LACK OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS PRECLUDE ANY ECONOMIC OR MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO EGYPT?

5. ANSWER: THAT IS TRUE (EXCEPT FOR CERTAIN CATEGORIES OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE) OF ALL MONEY APPROPRIATED UNDER THE FOREIGN ASSISTANCE ACT. AS I SAY, WE CANNOT ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF WHETHER WE CAN BE OF ASSISTANCE ON THIS PROJECT UNTIL WE KNOW MORE ABOUT WHAT IT ENTAILS, AND WHAT RESOURCES WOULD BE REQUIRED TO DO THE JOB.

6. QUESTION: DOESN'T SUCH ASSISTANCE IMPLY AN ACTIVE U.S. INTEREST IN SEEING THE CANAL REOPENED, AND WOULD WE NOT BE DIRECTLY FACILITATING SOVIET NAVAL MOVEMENTS INTO THE INDIAN OCEAN AND ELSEWHERE?

7. ANSWER: WE FAVOR THE OPENING OF THE SUEZ CANAL BECAUSE IT IS AN ELEMENT IN THE NORMALIZATION PROCESS FOR THIS CRISIS-RIDDEN AREA. THE REOPENING OF THE SUEZ CANAL WILL FACILITATE THE MOVEMENT OF SHIPS OF ALL NATIONS. THE OPENING OF THE CANAL DOES OFFER A GREATER STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE TO THE SOVIETS THAN THE U.S.; HOWEVER, CLOSURE OF THE CANAL HAS NOT PREVENTED THE USSR FROM MOVING ITS NAVAL VESSELS INTO THE INDIAN OCEAN AND ELSEWHERE WHEN MOSCOW DEEMED SUCH A MOVE TO BE IN ITS INTERESTS. OF GREATER IMPORTANCE, A STABLE PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST--TOWARD WHICH THE RECENT DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT IS A FIRST STEP--REDUCES THE OPPORTUNITY TO OUTSIDE POWERS TO EXPLOIT TENSIONS IN THE AREA. UNQUOTE RUSH

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